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PERSIAN

LACQUER

PERSIAN ART

IN THE process of standardizing, which the world is undergoing, Persia, like other Oriental countries, has been casting aside her intimate national arts, as a traveler might throw away even the most precious things that hamper him. Happily for us, there are those who gather up these impedimenta and even sift the dust heaps of dead civilizations, by which we profit through the thousand and one things that enrich our museums and private collections.

The City Art Museum has recently added to its small beginning of a collection of Persian intimate art, in metal work, painting, fabric and pottery. Having already various pieces of armor, richly damascened, some examples recently purchased show the

work of an earlier period, simpler, more severe and with the damascening applied with less intention of relying upon its richness to the exclusion or weakening of other means of producing effect. In a helmet, shield, and a ceremonial double-bladed axe, the ground is etched away, leaving archaic figures, and arabesques, with the usual inscriptions, in these instances in cufic characters; the damascening is applied in thin lines, not always most effectively. Another ceremonial axe has its decoration confined to inscriptions and arabesques, with the exception of a couple of small birds, and is therefore richer in general effect; it is, like the others, of early Mohammedan work.

A kalem-dan, or writer's pen case for articles necessary to the scribe, is made of steel in the conventional shape, thickly damascened with gold. Two other kalem-dans, previously purchased, are of lacquer work; one of them is decorated with figure subjects, in panels, painted in warm mellow colors, separated by borders in gold, the inner case covered with arabesques in gold on a vermillion ground. The smaller example is in olive green and gold, very delicately treated with an all-over pattern of arabesques; its inner case is decorated with a rustic interlacing of vines in the same scheme of color.

A miniature, beautifully painted, represents an incident in Persian history, attending the overthrow of Shah Hussein by Mahmoud the Afghan, in 1722. The Shah has sent his preachers to the pulpits and housetops to pray for help against the enemy; the various groups are shown against the deep, pure blue of the sky, and with a background of the rich decorative patterns of the architecture, most delicately drawn in an infinite

variety of units of design, and a delicate appreciation of harmony in colors.

Two book covers, painted in lacquer colors, are very fine examples of the miniature work in which Persian and Indian artists excelled. They show the usual beautiful painting of flowers and conventional borders and characteristic appreciation of the decorative value of pure color enriched with gold. One cover displays a scheme of florid tones, the other a more refined one of delicate flowers and arabesques on yellow, brown and gold grounds. Both are attributed to the XVI Century.

EGYPTIAN

AMONG the two thousand divine beings recognized by the ancient Egyptians, is Ptah; known under many names in the different Nomes or districts of the Nile valley, he was the chief god worshiped in the city of Memphis, founded by the first historic king of Egypt, Menes, about 4400 B. C. An ebony statuette of this god, recently acquired by the Museum, shows him in the mummy form of Osiris, his arms hidden in his wrappings, his hands grasping the "Uas" sceptre, the emblem of power, life and stability; an inscrutable smile is on his lips, his head bare.

A large black granite bowl from the Third Dynasty, found at Bet Khallef, is of fine close material, polished by much handling, the edges turned in and having a depression in the bottom, probably for convenience in grinding; it is an interesting example of the extreme patience of the ancient artizan, as well as of his skill in working so intractable a material.

A large mortar of a coarser granite, having two small handles or ears in the form of rams' heads, is also an

interesting and artistic product of ancient Egypt. The three pieces were formerly in the Rustafjael Collection.

To the department of textiles the Museum has added a number of interesting fragments of woven and embroidered robes and burial cloths: Egypto-Roman, Coptic and Saracenic, of periods extending from the First to the Tenth Century.

JAPANESE



JAPANESE SWORD GUARD

THE tsuba, or guard, of the Japanese sword offered to the metal worker the ideal portion of the weapon for the display of his skill as a craftsman. A Japanese gentleman wore no jewelry, so his taste in delicate metal work found its expression in his arms and armor; nowhere so much as in the sword, the privilege of his rank, which was constantly carried, and only laid aside when he entered his own home or that of a friend. The tsuba presenting the ideal surface and contour for its decoration, no diversity of material, variety of contour or method of working has been overlooked in making this important feature of the sword, the beautiful work of art it has become from its evolution from a merely